Is the section of verses 1-29 in Vākyapadīya III.3 based on a sound theoretical motivation?

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Abstract

The present article attempts to establish the following propositions: The remarks to be found in the initial segment of the so-called Saṃbandha-Samuddeśa of Bhartṛharti's Vākyapadīya, or Trikāṇḍī, can be interpreted in a way which permits to regard them as the expression of a valid theoretical view. It is important to investigate the possible existence of a sound theoretical motivation in philosophical treatises not only under the perspective of philosophical analysis but even in the framework of traditional textual exegesis irrespective of whether the textual sources represent a Western or a non-Western tradition of thought.

Keywords: Vākyapadīya, language, meaning, interpretation

La sección de versos 1-29 en Vākyapadīya III.3 ¿Está basada en un sana motivación teórica?

Resumen

El siguiente artículo pretende establecer las siguientes proposiciones: los comentarios a ser encontrados en el segmento inicial del llamado Saṃbandha-Samuddeśa de Bhartṛharti's Vākyapadīya, o Trikāṇḍī, se pueden interpretar de manera que permite a considerarlas como la expresión de una concepción teórica válida. Es importante investigar la posible existencia de una sana motivación teórica en los tratados filosóficos no solo bajo la perspectiva del análisis filosófico, sino también en el marco de una exégesis textual tradicional independientemente de que las fuentes textuales representen un pensamiento tradicional occidental o no occidental.

Palabras clave: Vākyapadīya, lenguaje, significado, interpretación

É a seção de versos 1-29 em Vākyapadīya III.3 baseada em uma saudável motivação teórica?

Resumo

O seguinte artigo pretende estabelecer as seguintes proposições: Os comentarios acharam no segmento inicial do chamado Saṃbandha-Samuddeśa de de Bhartṛharti's Vākyapadīya, ou Trikāṇḍī, se podem interpretar de manera que

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permite considerarlas como a expressão de uma válida vista teórica. É importante investigar a posible existencia de uma saudável motivação teórica nos tratados filosóficos não solo baixo a perspectiva do análise filosófico mas tambem no enquadramento de uma exegese tradicional e textual independente de que as fontes textuales representen um pensamento tradicional ocidental ou não occidental.

Palavras-chave: Vākyapadīya, linguagem, significado, interpretação

The claim that the section of the verses 1-29 of the Saṃbandha-Samuddeśa (SS) can be connected with a theoretical stance which is both objectively sound and plausible in our eyes will be substantiated in the subsequent section by focusing on a set of verses which presumably represent the most central ingredients of a theoretical tenet concerning (natural) language. The task is to show that even in cases where individual remarks could be interpreted as representing false or highly questionable theorems against the background of purely linguistic and philological considerations, there are always also readings allowing to understand them as the expression of a valid theoretical outlook and harmonizing with linguistic and philological criteria at least equally well. It has to be acknowledged, nevertheless, that in a number of instances those interpretations differ from ones which had been advocated in previous studies on the text.

We presume that the last verse 29 within the segment which is considered here expresses a pivotal theorem. It reads as follows:

indriyāṇāṃ svaviṣayeṣv anādir yogyatā yathā /

anādir arthair śabdānāṃ saṃbandho yogyatā tathā[2]

and could be literally rendered as follows:

2 In the same manner as the beginningless fitness of the sense-faculties with respect to their objects the relation of words with their objects is a beginningless fitness.

It can be assumed that a paraphrase, such as:

In the same manner as the relation between the sense-faculties and their objects consists in a fitness without beginning also the relation between words and their objects is a beginningless fitness.

Would not substantially distort the intended import of the original. Anyhow, in view of the fact that the idea of an eternal relation intimates the supposition of an eternal existence of the items which are related, the problem arises whether the tenet formulated in the quoted verse implies the eternal existence of words or of other kinds of linguistic expressions. In this connection a remark to be found in Houben 1995:148 deserves to be taken into account. It points out that even the term nitya ('eternal') is sometimes to be understood as 'relatively permanent' or 'continuous'. Accordingly the word 'beginningless' can be plausibly interpreted as possessing a more modest import entailing merely the non-existence of some definite ascertainable beginning. This in its turn permits to reconcile the pertinent theorem both with common sense and the notion of a difference akin to the distinction embodied in the current concepts of linguistic types and linguistic tokens. After all, fairly common observations are apt to engender the idea that linguistic units produced either in the oral or written medium at a particular occasion instantiate linguistic items belonging to a linguistic system, as for example a natural language, such that the same items instantiated at a particular occasion are –or at least could be– equally instantiated at earlier or later times. There is no compelling reason to interpret verse 29 as promoting the tenet of the eternality of words, as advocated in certain schools in India. Rather the pertinent statement can be –and presumably should be– understood as the propagation of a proposition which everybody ought to admit irrespective of any specific theoretical outlook, leaving room for the adoption of the tenet of the eternality of linguistic objects in the stricter sense as a possibility without entailing it. As far as the pertinent import of the term which has been rendered above by the word 'object' is concerned, it appears fairly probable that the occurrence of the lexeme artha- in verse 29 deserves to be interpreted in the light of the same lexem in verse 1 of the SS. This means that the import of arthair (śabdānāṃ) equals the import of the expression bāhyo 'rthaḥ ('external object') occurring in the first verse. To be sure, this circumstance insinuates a somewhat 'antiquated' outlook on matters of semantics according to which words are generally related to objects in the way that they 'stand for them[3], that they are proxies or surrogates for other objects different from them.

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2. Inasmuch as variant readings are not potentially relevant for the argumentation they are not mentioned here.
3. Presumably one should concur with Houben 1995:148 in rejecting the thesis that the expression 'external' needs to be interpreted as implying the physical nature of the concerned items. Possibly the expression merely reflects the view that, at least in the vast majority of cases, words are not being used for referring to themselves.

In this connection it seems imperative to discard any considerations about the personal beliefs of the author of the text and instead focus on the question whether the statement formulated in verse 29 necessitates the above described claim. It is almost a truism that the expression artha- is highly equivocal and that apart from uses in the sense of 'thing', 'object' it encompasses employments in the sense of 'meaning', 'sense', 'content' as well as others. Against this background it should be legitimate to interpret verse 29 as advancing a tenet which reads as follows:

In the same manner as sense faculties possess a permanent capacity for the cognition of particular objects, such that the sense of vision is fit for the grasp of visual qualities and no others, the sense of hearing is fit for the grasp of auditory qualities and no others, and so on for the remaining sense faculties, so also words as items which belong to a linguistic system are fit to convey particular meanings whenever they are employed or encountered at particular occasions.

It seems that a re-formulation in terms of linguistic types and linguistic tokens preserves the gist of the idea, if it is presented as follows:

The meanings of linguistic tokens are determined by the meanings of corresponding linguistic types.

In this manner the relevant tenet is extricated from serious theoretical problems. Whereas it is highly doubtful that words such as 'not', 'or', 'and' and many others are proxies for particular (presumably abstract) objects, nobody would deny that those items possess a meaning, if 'possess a meaning' amounts to the same as 'being meaningful'[4]. The circumstance that the analogy with sense organs or sense faculties could insinuate the impossibility of linguistic synonymy should not create a momentous difficulty. Even it it were supposed that sense qualities of some sort can be grasped by at most one sense organ, it would be illegitimate to infer that the situation that different expressions possess the capacity to convey identical meanings is ruled out by the tenet propagated in verse 29. As it holds good for similes and analogies in general one ought to suppose that even here the comparison pertains to particular aspects only and does not entail that the two situations are alike in every respect. A more significant problem is posed by the fact that the proposition formulated in verse 29 does not indicate any difference

Between individual words and complex expressions constituted by compositions or concatenations of elementary linguistic items like words or morphemes. This could reflect a view according to which language consists of a 'platonic' universe of infinitely many expressions of any length and complexity such that every item possesses a pre-determined meaning in the same manner as individual words. Again it is imperative to abstain from considerations regarding possible personal opinions of the writer of the text as well as from the question of the tenability of views advanced by other theoreticians before or during the creation of the SS concerning the manner in which meanings of complex units like sentences depend on meanings of their constituents. Conceivably none of those views is acceptable in the final analysis. But in the present connection this question is irrelevant. What matters is rather the fact that the theorem advanced in the pertinent verse can be reconciled with any account pertaining to meanings of complex linguistic items. In order to bring the tenet into agreement with the view that sentences are not atomic or indivisible semantic units like certain words or morphemes, not a rejection is required but at most a modification or explication. This can be achieved by adding the theoretical ingredient that the rules regulating the computation of the meanings of complex expressions on the basis of the meanings of their constituents is given independently of the meanings of individual linguistic tokens. It deserves to be emphasized that there is no reason to suppose that this amendment would distort the author's intention. The very lack of any reference to complex linguistic units could derive from the circumstance that the writer of the text deliberately intended to leave the issue of the constitution of meanings of complex units open at this stage of discussion.

However a danger of inadequacy persists due to the existence of phenomena which apparently militate against the view that the meanings of linguistic tokens are determined by the meanings of linguistic types. Let us suppose that somebody (assertively) utters the sentence

(1) Wine is not wine.

Isn't it conceivable that a speaker uttering (1) could mean quite different things in different contexts? Could not an assertive utterance of (1) equally well convey the proposition that there are different types of wine which significantly differ regarding their quality or that the prices

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4. This exempts the pertinent tenet also from the reproach of ignoring insights which have been attained by other theoreticians of the Indian tradition. Particularly representatives of the philosophy of Madhyamaka, such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, appear to have clearly recognized the naivety of the opinion that all words stand for objects and that accordingly even the word 'nothing' needs to be a proxy for some particular entity, an item which might be designated by the expression 'the nothing'.

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of different wines can differ to a considerable degree or that it is not the case that everything which is passed off as wine is also wine in actual fact or, supposed the expression is used somewhat elliptically presupposing a constituent like 'for ….' after 'wine', that somebody, perhaps the speaker himself, is a wine connoisseur who is able to perceive qualitative merits or deficiencies and attaches importance to such differences? In this connection it is appropriate to point out that the writer of the SS has, at least to some extent, taken this phenomenon into account. The first verse of the SS reads as follows:

jñānaṃ prayoktur bāhyo 'rthaḥ svarūpaṃ ca pratīyate /

śabdair uccaritais teṣāṃ saṃbandhaḥ samavasthitaḥ //

It can be literally rendered as follows:

By words that are uttered a cognition of the one who uses [them], an external object and the own form [of the words] are comprehended. Their relation is fixed.

The significance of this verse for the pertinent issue emerges as soon as one observes a distinction between the meaning of linguistic expressions and that what somebody using an expression with a particular meaning means by using them (in this meaning). Whereas the theorem formulated in verse 29 should be understood as relating to the first item, viz. that which linguistic expressions mean themselves, something which might be termed the 'meaning content' of linguistic expressions, the deviances observed in the previous paragraph pertain to the second issue, viz. that what somebody might mean by using meaningful expressions. To be sure, the above quoted verse presents an indication of this difference at best in a fairly veiled form. It could even militate against the last segment of the verse, if the formulation teṣāṃ saṃbandhaḥ samavasthitaḥ ('Their relation is fixed') would represent a statement implying that the relation between words and 'cognitions' of those employing them at some occasion is fixed in the same manner as the connection between words and their 'objects' or meaning contents or (possibly) the relation between uttered words and their 'own form'[5]. It is a realistic possibility that the writer of the SS did not envisage that 'meaning-intentions' of language users should be encompassed in the range of the concept represented by the expression jñānaṃ prayoktur ('cognition of user') and that he intended to refer in the first place to cognitive states, such as pictorial representations of objects or situations in somebody's mind or perhaps also beliefs indicated by the utterance of sentences. In spite of that, it is significant that in itself the distinction between semantic properties and psychological or cognitive states of subjects employing linguistic expressions, which is definitely acknowledged in verse 1 of the SS, permits to account for the difference between meanings of expressions deriving from linguistic conventions or rules on the one hand and communicative intentions of language users on the other hand. The decisive point is, however, that even if this contention were not admitted, it would be illegitimate to reject the tenet formulated in verse 29 in view of the occurrence of specific and possibly novel communicative intentions connected with the employment of meaningful expressions. The fact persists that, in all probability, the theorem formulated in the final verse of the considered segment of the SS should specifically refer to properties of linguistic objects and not to language users.

Nevertheless, there are additional problems which must be accounted for. The first difficulty has to do with the phenomenon of language learning. Obviously a child during the process of the acquisition of linguistic competence possesses an ability to correctly understand novel linguistic expressions even without prior knowledge of relevant lexical conventions or pertinent syntactic and semantic rules. Presumably the possibility of success in this respect relies, among other factors, on the capability to entertain correct hypotheses concerning mental states, in particular communicative intentions of other speakers, as well as the possibility to make correct judgements about what is and what is not meaningful to say in some individual situation. Here the term 'meaningful' possesses an import that is related, but nevertheless differs from the one in which the word has been used above. It could be paraphrased by terms such as 'purposeful', 'relevant', 'reasonable', 'having a point' and other similar ones. If it is true that sometimes non-arbitrary assessments can be made about psychological states of other subjects and, most of all, concerning the reasonability or rationality of particular kinds of actions in specific situations even without linguistic knowledge, then a possibility exists to account for the origination of linguistic conventions in human history, so that the hypothesis of the beginningless existence of language becomes futile. But this could create a predicament for the view represented by verse 29 of the SS only if it entailed the strong contention of the eternality of words or other linguistic expressions. Given, however, that it was not the intention of the writer of the text to advocate this thesis, the objection becomes irrelevant.

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5.   In the present context the import of the term svarūpa- ('own form') need not be discussed. (More detailed investigations on this topic are to be found in Houben 1995 as well as in Oetke 2012:65ff)

Therefore primary attention must be paid to another problem. Meanings of linguistic expressions can be explained either in the way that for expressions already possessing some meaning their pre-existing meaning is made known to somebody who might not yet know this fact or in the way that novel meanings for already existing items or for not previously existing elementary units or concatenations of elementary units are stipulated. The second variety plays a most prominent role in the Indian tradition of grammar and linguistics. Many pertinent specimens can be found in oldest sources like Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī. Verse 3 of the SS, which reads:

asyāyaṃ vācako vācya iti ṣaṣṭhyā pratīyate /

yogaḥ śabdārthayos tattvam apy ato vyapadiśyate

'This is a signifier/an expression of this [and this] is its [correlate] [which is] to be signified/expressed', thus the connection between word and [its] object is comprehended by the sixth case ending (= the genitive suffix); hence also a state of things is pointed out.

Intimates that the writer of the SS was in the present context fully aware of the phenomenon of linguistic explanation, at least as far as the first variety is concerned. On the other hand, it is difficult to see, why the possibility of explaining existing (conventional) meanings should threaten the thesis advanced in verse 29, which should be perfectly compatible with the assumption that knowledge about meaning could be acquired. Hence it is not completely unreasonable to suspect that the very occurrence of the verse in the present context indicates that the writer of the SS was concerned about the second variety. This conjecture can be sustained by the deliberation that the admission of the first type of explanation urges one to admit the possibility of the second type of explanation. The following is an outline of the pertinent reasoning: In situations of ordinary linguistic explanation somebody who previously did not know the meaning of an expression is enabled to know its meaning and successfully employ it in communication. But for the acquisition of his linguistic competence it is not only not necessary that he knew the meaning before but even any later knowledge about previous ways of using the pertinent expression is in principle irrelevant. It suffices that he believes or acts on the presumption that if he employs the expression in accordance with the explanation then he will use it correctly. Even this is still more than required for communicative success: In principle the instructed person could successfully employ a linguistic unit if he supposes that he will successfully communicate if he follows the instruction disregarding the question of correctness, provided that other persons

with whom he communicates act on the same premises. Now it is not any more difficult to recognize the potential threat for the tenet propagated in verse 29: Suppose some natural language could be traced back to some original instructor who for the first time attributed meanings to all or to a considerable number of its expressions; then the contention that the 'fitness' between expressions and their meaning is without any definite beginning would be untenable at least with respect to the pertinent language. In this regard there is no need to hypothesize the tenet of an absolutely eternal connection between words and meanings. The mere supposition of the non-existence of some definite beginning suffices for making the theorem vulnerable. For achieving his purpose an original instructor could exploit the stratagem of inducing in the instructed subjects a false belief to the effect that his instruction is in accordance with some previously established norm. But if the previously expounded argument is correct, this is not necessary. One could establish a convention by this method by instructing a relevant number of people as to how expressions should be used by them.

As a matter of fact, the above delineated contemplation is still insufficient for a definite disproval of the tenet of a beginning less connection between expressions and meanings, and the reason is quite obvious. The envisaged method of instruction supposedly relies on the employment of meaningful linguistic items for the explanation of novel meaning connections. Hence the advocate of the tenet of the beginning less nature of meaning relations could retort that it amounts to a gross misunderstanding of his thesis if it were taken as ruling out the possibility of establishing novel meaning connexions. The decisive point is rather that some meaning relations must exist which did not come into being at some definite time. But now the opponent could reply as follows: The understanding required for the subsequent success of the explanation(s) is not an understanding of a person but an understanding of linguistic expressions. As long as it can be taken for granted that every understanding of linguistic expressions relies on a grasp of their previously

Established meanings, the argument of the advocate of a beginningless nature of some meaning relations might be valid. It might be also admitted that in ordinary meaning explanations the recognition of previously unknown meaning relations relies on a grasp of the established meanings of the explanatory sentences. But where is the proof that it must always be like that? The fact that something holds true for explanatory sentences encountered in ordinary life does not definitely prove that the same holds good for explanatory items in general. If it could be consistently

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assumed that there are some sentences, presumably deviating from the ordinary ones, which are self-explanatory in the sense that they simultaneously express some meaning and explain it, then the contention of the proponent of beginningless meaning relations lacks a sound theoretical basis. Thus it emerges that a proof to the effect that self-explanatory linguistic items cannot exist possesses a vital importance for the credibility of the contention formulated in verse 29 of the SS.

Against this background the question attains relevance whether the author of the pertinent textual section has provided a proof or the attempt of a proof of the proposition that self-explanatory sentences cannot exist. Our conjecture is that the investigated segment of the SS contains more than a mere effort to substantiate this theorem. Given that on the one hand a considerable degree of equivocation exhibited by pertinent formulations impedes straightforward judgments and on the other hand comparatively detailed deliberations concerning philological and grammatical issues have been presented elsewhere[6], a condensed exposition appears legitimate, even if it is fragmentary in some respects. Verse 4 possesses central importance in the present context. It reads as follows:

nābhidhānaṃ svadharmeṇa saṃbandhasyāsti vācakam /

atyantaparatantratvād rūpaṃ nāsyāpadiśyate

There is no term which is a signifier/expression of the relation in accordance with its own characteristic; due to complete dependence its form is not indicated[7]

A problem lies in the circumstance that the quoted verse is suited to arouse an impression of perversity as if somebody denies that one can speak about something about which he attempts to say something. Apart from this a contention to the effect that some relation cannot be 'signified' by any term appears disconcerting not only for relations in general, but also for semantic relations in particular. Common sense would rather suggest that it is not only possible to speak about meaning relations in some broad sense of the word 'about' but that it should be even feasible to refer to them, particularly by singular terms, such as:

The meaning relation between 'München' and Munich

And similar ones. Since in the preceding verse the contention has been voiced that relations between words and their objects or meanings are indicated by the sixth case

ending or the genitive suffix one can be tempted to surmise that the subsequent verse should embody the claim that meaning relations can be indicated by no other means than genitive suffixes. The problem is, however, that an argument deriving from the premise that something can be indicated by some means the conclusion that it cannot be indicated by any other means is not only implausible but absolutely ridiculous. In view of the fact that the theorem that self-explanatory linguistic items cannot exist contains the idea of self-reference as its ingredient it would not be eccentric to suspect that verse 4 does not embody a claim about the possibility of signifying relations by terms in general but rather concerns the question as to whether terms could signify their own meaning relations. One could surmise in addition that the expression svadharmeṇa which had been rendered above by 'in accordance with its own characteristic' and which could be equally rendered by 'according to its own (specific) property' has been used to indicate this restriction, so that a suitable explication could be given by 'in the form of its own property' or 'as a quality which belongs to (the term) itself'.

The proposition that words do not signify their own meaning-relations appears in fact highly plausible considering, for example, that the German word 'München', as ordinarily understood, designates the town which is called 'Munich' in English and not any relation between the word and some object, a relation which might be, nevertheless, specifiable by different terms like "the relation of denotation between 'München' and Munich" or "the meaning relation between 'München' and Munich" or similar ones. But there are still difficulties which need to be solved. It is hard to see, why the fact that proper names or other singular terms denoting or meaning something or the other do not simultaneously denote or mean a relation between themselves and the items denoted or meant by them possesses relevance for the tenet that self-explanatory sentences are not possible. In this connection it is important to note that presumably the writer of the SS did not attribute importance to terminological distinctions regarding various semantic relations connected with different categories of expressions, such as names or singular terms, predicates and sentences. Accordingly one is entitled to assume that the term vācaka- ('signifier', 'signifying') does not take such differences into account and exhibits a sort of neutrality which is also shared by the English word 'mean'. Hence the remark represented by the first half of verse 4 is not intended to refer to relations between names

6. E.g. in Houben 1995, as well as in Oetke 2012:45-211 and Oetke 2013:12-25.
7. In Houben 1995 the following translation is given: There is no word that signifies the relation according to its specific property. Because it is extremely dependent, its form cannot be pointed out.

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or singular terms and their correlated meaning objects in particular but should be taken as applying to expressions of any linguistic category, thus also to sentences. It follows that with respect to items, such as:

(2) 'München' (in German) means Munich.

The pertinent thesis entails that anything which the sentence means or expresses is not simultaneously something which the same sentence explains as its own meaning. This contention is highly plausible because it does not militate against the natural supposition that the meaning of (2) can be explained by employing a sentence different from it, such as:

(3) "'München' (in German) means Munich" means that (the German word) 'München' means Munich.

or alternatively:

(3') The sentence designated by the symbol '(2)' means that (the German word) 'München' means Munich.

This should not be the last word, however, because, if the pertinent conjecture regarding the overreaching argumentative aim is correct, it cannot be sufficient to appeal to the observation that usually explanatory sentences differ from their explananda, but it needs to be shown that the same function which different explanatory sentences can perform cannot be performed by the explananda themselves. It would be of no avail to resort to the claim that sentences cannot refer to their own meanings and can never express any truth about them, because this contention appears to be blatantly false, as vindicated by the following example:

(4) The meaning of the sentence which is being uttered by me just now is a meaning of an English sentence.

Or

(4') That which the sentence which is being uttered by me just now expresses can be expressed in English.

Given that (4) or (4') are meaningful English sentences they must exhibit a meaning content which can be expres-

sed in English. Hence one should assume that (4) and (4') express something true[8]. It seems that substantially more is required for vindicating a tenet of the impossibility of self-explanations. For identifying the decisive ingredient which is still lacking one needs to draw attention to the fact that the above quoted sentences, although purporting to refer to or to say something about their own meaning do not furnish any explanation of their meanings. In order to see more clearly why those items fail to perform such a function it is appropriate to consider the following example:

(5) The favourite colour of Sarah Wagenknecht is better suited to evoke romantic associations than the favourite colour of Hans Dietrich Genscher.

Presumably many people would have greatest difficulties in assessing the truth value of (5) although they might be disposed to immediately assent to a claim expressed by

(6) The colour red is better suited to evoke romantic associations than the colour yellow.

The reason is obviously that in the case of (5) the two definite descriptions flanking the relational expression '….is better suited to evoke romantic associations than ____' do not reveal by themselves which particular colour is referred to, whereas in the case of (6) the two descriptions do not leave room for any uncertainty in this respect. In contrast to (6) mere understanding of the sense of the singular terms occurring in (5) can never suffice for the possibility of recognizing which individual item is meant[9]. On the terminological level the difference could be accounted for by distinguishing between 'representing' and 'not representing' singular terms or ways of referring to objects, such that the first variety is only exhibited by (6). Evidently a meaning explanation has to exploit a representing reference to the meaning to be revealed, and it is for this reason that (4) or (4') unlike (3) and (3') cannot serve for the elucidation of a meaning. The success of a meaning explanation specifying a meaning relation between linguistic items and their meaning crucially depends on the possibility of definitely identifying both relata which are concerned. Now it can be recognized why

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8. The fact that the word relation does not appear in those sentences is irrelevant because the tenet of the impossibility of self-explanation does not demand that explanatory sentences contain the expression 'meaning relation' as their constituent. Nevertheless, the pertinent point could be equally made by using the word 'relation' in a sentence, such as:

    The meaning relation of which the sentence which is being uttered by me just now is one of its relata is a relation which has an English sentence as one of its relata.

    Otherwise a lot of things can be said about relations as such, e.g. that they are or are not reflexive, symmetric, transitive etc.

9. The difference emerges also in modal constructions. Whereas

    The color red could be the colour yellow.

    8is obviously false, this does not hold true for

    The favourite colour of Sarah Wagenknecht could be the favourite colour of Hans Dietrich Genscher.

    – One must not be misled by the circumstance that both persons might be disinclined to acknowledge this.

it is inconceivable that an explanatory sentence explains its own meaning. Given that such items possess the form of

S means M

or

S means that P.

where 'S' stands for a linguistic item and 'M' for some meaning which a linguistic item possesses and 'P' for some propositional content which a linguistic item expresses if it is a declarative sentence (possessing such content), the supposition that some replacement for 'M' provides a representing reference to the meaning of the explanatory sentence or that 'P' presents the content which is expressed by the explanatory sentence is incongruous. Even supposing that sometimes meanings or meaning contents of complex expressions might be identical with the meanings or contents of some of their constituents[10], such an assumption appears inacceptable in the concerned cases. It seems impossible to view 'S means ….' and 'S means that ….' as functors which map meanings or meaning contents to themselves. The incongruousness could also be manifested by pointing out that, since a meaning relation depends on the connected relata, it cannot specify its nature by occurring itself as an item connected by the very same relation to a particular linguistic item. Apparently this consideration is invoked in verse 4.

Although – in view of the vagueness of linguistic representation exhibited by the verse – absolute certainty is impossible, the writer of the text might have been aware of the fact that for explanatory meaning statements not mere references to both linguistic and semantic items but representing references are required. The occurrence of the expression svadharmeṇa would in fact indicate the existence of an awareness to that effect if it had been intended to suggest by that expression that for a specification of the individual nature of a meaning relation, and possibly of relations in general, all the related items need to be completely determined. Possibly the occurrence of that expression should perform various functions at the same time. In that case the absence of a more straightforward indication of the self-referential ingredient of the pertinent theorem could be even better explained.

If the preceding deliberations are accepted, it can be contended that not only explanatory items but sentences expressing some content in general cannot perform the

following two functions at the same time: a) expressing some content and b) expressing the fact that the sentence expresses the content in question. Although the verses 23 and 24 appear in the context of a reply to an objection, it is probable that they were meant to support this claim.

They are at least objectively suited to substantiate that contention. They read as follows:

na hi saṃśayarūpe 'rthe śeṣatvena vyavasthite /

avyudāse svarūpasya saṃśayo 'nyaḥ pravartate

yadā ca nirṇayajñāne nirṇayatvena nirṇayaḥ /

prakramyate tadā jñānaṃ svadharme nāvatiṣṭhate

For regarding an object which has the nature of a doubt and is subordinate [with respect to its object] no other doubt is operative in so far as it does not lose its own nature.

And when cognition of ascertainment is ascertained as an ascertainment then the cognition does not persist in its own character.

These two verses bring in analogical examples from the domain of mental phenomena for which correlations with the area of linguistic facts can be construed as follows:

(I) If some linguistic item expresses a certain meaning content it does not automatically generate an operation of expressing that it expresses the content in question Û If a doubt of first order arises a doubt of second order does not arise together with it (at the same time).

(II) If it happens that some linguistic item expresses a statement concerning that which some linguistic item expresses then the content of that statement necessarily differs from the content that is expressed by the item whose meaning content is being assessed Û The nature of a second order ascertainment necessarily differs from the nature of the corresponding first order ascertainment because of the difference of their contents.

The importance of (II) derives from the fact that, as long as linguistic units are supposed to be free from ambiguities, the supposition that some unit U expresses that P and some unit U* expresses that U expresses that P necessitates the consequence that U and U* are (numerically) different. If, on the other hand, the possibility of ambiguities were admitted, it still follows that at any time there must exist some content of some linguistic token about which the fact that it expresses the content in question remains unexpressed, provided the following

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10. For example in the case of P and It is true that P this supposition is not absurd – although not uncontroversial.

possibilities are not admitted: (i) Some item expresses an actual infinity of meaning contents or (ii) actually infinity chains of linguistic units commenting on other linguistic units occur. Given that meaning relations are acknowledged as possible objects it follows that the proposition that everything which exists at some time can also be named or designated at that time cannot hold good.

The verses 23 and 24 of the SS defend a contention resulting as a consequence of the impossibility of self-explanatory items. It says that both producers of linguistic tokens and their interpreters pursue only that which those tokens mean, i.e. they, as producers, express some meaning content, and as interpreters (try to) grasp the content which is meant or expressed.

Does, however, not happen that, in addition to it, they with the very same words express something about the connection between the concerned linguistic tokens and their meaning or try to assess the connection by this. The relevant contention is presented in verse 19, after a digression about the possibility of the occurrence of restrictions pertaining to individual expressions and their specific meanings. This verse reads as follows:

prāptiṃ tu samavāyākhyāṃ vācyadharmātivartinīm /

prayoktā pratipattā vā na śabdair anugacchati

Yet neither the utterer nor the hearer approaches through words the [relation of] attainment [between words and their objects] called "inherence", which goes beyond the characteristics that are to be expressed.

This proposition invites contradiction. Doesn't it violate its own maxim by attempting to impart something about its own meaning relation by making the general claim that the relationship between linguistic items and their own meaning or content is not their topic? There can be no doubt that the author of the SS was fully aware of the predicament because he not only presented the difficulty in the form of an objection, in the verses 20-21, but also attempts to respond to the criticism. It can be presumed that the response to the objection comprises the whole section of the verses 22-28 of which the above quoted stanzas form a part. This last hypothesis is, however, confronted with a problem which is rooted in verse 25. According to a customary interpretation this verse presents a reference to a truth paradox – which is usually designated in a somewhat infelicitous manner by the term 'Liar Paradox'. It had been even contended that the section of verse 25 and the subsequent ones up to verse 29 present (the attempt of) a solution of the so-called Liar Paradox. If those readings were correct it could

not be any longer maintained that the textual segment that is the topic of the present investigation is exclusively dedicated to the issue of meaning and meaning relations. The crucial stanza 25 reads as follows:

sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmīti naitad vākyaṃ vivakṣyate /

tasya mithyābhidhāne hi prakrānto rtho na gamyate

[With the words:] "Everything [which I speak] I speak falsely" this sentence is not intended to be meant. For if it is said falsely the intended object is not attained.

The above mentioned 'conventional interpretation' hypothesizes that the expression sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi is equivalent to 'Everything which I say is false'. The consequence which the verse proposes should be that for the sake of avoiding an inconsistency the pertinent statement itself must be excluded from the domain of the universal quantification. This reading causes trouble due to the circumstance that a) it is inexplicable why the sequence of thoughts should suddenly shift to a different topic and b) the problem which allegedly is the topic of the pertinent textual segment is dealt with in a completely unsatisfactory, if not superficial, manner. But is this understanding mandatory?

The reason why this reading is not obligatory lies in the circumstance that the expression mithyā is not a synonym of the predicates 'is false', 'is untrue' in the veridical sense of those words. To be sure, if the adverbial expression mithyā relates to matters of truth, in can be frequently rendered by the word 'false' in English. In other contexts equivalents such as 'untruthful' could be appropriate. The decisive point is that the use of the expression mithyā is by no means restricted to the veridical aspect. Presumably it possesses a far broader lexical import encompassing phenomena of misleadingness or deceptiveness in general. If this is correct, no compelling reason exists to relate the pertinent occurrence of the term to the dimension of truth instead of meaning. In connection with linguistic items this difference amounts to the contrast between their capacity of pretending truth despite of actual untruth on the one hand and the possibility that linguistic units, in particular linguistic tokens, induce erroneous suppositions regarding their actual meaning. Given that mithyā in the context of sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi relates to misleadingness with respect to meaning, the sentence as a whole could represent either a statement to the effect that the speaker in fact never intends to communicate that which the meanings of the words used by him suggest or that the words in the mouth of the speaker possess always a meaning that differs from their conventional meaning.

It is easy to see that if those hypotheses were applied to the pertinent utterance itself the basis for its interpretation would be destroyed. The possibility of my expressing by using words, which conventionally mean that my words never mean what they conventionally mean, requires that at least the words uttered on this occasion are interpreted in accordance with their conventional meaning. On the other hand, the possibility of somebody's imparting to others the fact that he never intends to say what he appears to say in the light of established linguistic conventions by using expressions which possess this meaning requires that at least in the pertinent context of communication the speaker can be taken to mean what he appears to mean. Otherwise communicative success would be thwarted. Its objective can be realized without hindrance at best if it were exempt from the generalization.

The formulation of the verse provides support for this reading due to the occurrence of the expression na gamyate. In contrast to virudhyate the words na gamyate do not indicate the slightest allusion to any idea of inconsistency or incompatibility. On the other hand the sequence prakrānto 'rtho na gamyate is perfectly suited to convey the idea of communicative failure. It is even conceivable that the pertinent occurrence of the term artha- had been intentionally employed with a double import: a) in the sense of 'meaning' for conveying the idea of failure of expressing the content which needs to be expressed, b) in the sense of 'purpose' for imparting the thought that without hypothesizing a restriction with respect to the generality of the statement, the realization of the intended communicative goal would be obstructed.

In this manner the remark of verse 25 smoothly blends in the argumentative context. The connection is as follows: In the same manner as verse 19 the sentence sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi represents (at least in one reading) a general statement pertaining to the relationship between expressions and their meanings, or, if not this, then at least to the relation between expressions and that which their users mean by using them. If this statement would (among others) relate to the formulation of the statement itself, its actual meaning would become inscrutable or the communicative goal of communicating some pertinent piece of information would be thwarted. But, as a matter of fact, the meaning of sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi can be

assessed and those words can be even used for expressing some possible state of affairs. Thus the conclusion must be drawn that the making of a general statement where some ascription could be related to the statement's formulation itself is not tantamount to the ascription of a property to a plurality of items involving its ascription to the formulation in particular. As in the case of conversational implicatures in general, the communication of the thought that everything uttered by some speaker is not meant in its usual sense apart from the pertinent utterance itself rests on the possibility to identify some established linguistic meaning and recognizing that, by hypothesizing the most straightforward reading, principles of rationality of linguistic behaviour would be violated. But in the case of items like sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi the possibility of imparting a not straightforward import derives from the very nature of sentences expressing generality and universal quantifications. Thus it emerges that established linguistic conventions play a central role by being employed as a means of communicating thoughts, including propositions pertaining to matters of meaning.

The same point could not be made with the same degree of strength if the expression mithyā were taken as relating to untruth. An assertoric sentence which is being used to disclaim among others truth with respect to itself generates a threat of inconsistency. But the very possibility of recognizing this threat presupposes the possibility of attributing to the sentence a meaning and an import which entails the self-referential truth-denial[11]

This expedient of defending the consistency of the remark embodied in verse 19 by pointing out a fact about the nature of sentences expressing generality or universal quantifications generates itself a most acute problem.

The conclusion that the statement of that verse and possibly even the general thesis concerning the impossibility of self-explanatory sentences should be interpreted in a manner according to which the pertinent items are themselves exempt from the general rule. But this certainly militates against the actual intention underlying those assertions. It should be surmised that the remark of verse 19 possesses a character that is analogous to that of the statement of a proponent of linguistic compositionality, if he says:

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11. In Coward/Kunjunni-Raja 1990:158 a paraphrase of verse 25 is offered which reads as follows:
> To take another case: in saying "all that I am saying is false" (sarvaṃ mithyā bravīmi) one does not intend to include that very sentence in the scope of its meaning, for then, as what one is saying would be implicitly false, the intended meaning would not be conveyed.

Do not the difficulties to extract from this presentation a fairly plausible thought content – why, for example, should one believe that if someone says something which is false (either explicitly or even implicitly) no 'intended meaning' is conveyed? – present a sufficient reason for mistrusting portrayals of this kind?

The meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its immediate constituents and the mode of composition11.[12]

The advocate of compositionality does surely not intend to assert that the rule holds true with respect to all other linguistic items except the one that formulates the theorem itself. The contention is rather that the principle of compositionality, if it is correct at all, is equally valid for the complex expression by which the principle is formulated. On the other hand, one can recognize that, although the theorem should pertain to all complex expressions of a(n arbitrary natural) language without exception, it does not formulate a claim concerning the formulation of the principle in particular. It does not even contain any singular term referring to the particular meaning of the expression by which the theorem is formulated. One can rather ascertain that by expressing a general maxim it implies that a certain property must hold true of the expression formulating the theorem itself. The same fact could be brought to light also in the following manner. By saying:

(A) An assertion does (by itself) not provide a proof of its truth.

one asserts something which implies that it is true even of (A) itself that it does not provide a proof of its truth. Given that the implied proposition is in fact true the general assertion can be assessed as true without imposing any restriction on its generality in the domain of assertions. Nevertheless, (A) does not ascribe any specific quality to itself in particular. Apart from the quality which allegedly holds true of assertions in general it does not provide information about any specific property of the assertion which is made by an utterance of the above quoted sequence of words. The presumption that the defence of the statement of stanza 19 does not end with verse 25 has been indicated before. Now, verse 27 of the SS reads as follows:

asādhikā pratijñeti neyam evābhidhīyate /

yathā tathāsya dharmo ʼpi naiva kaścit pratīyate

Just as [with the words:] "An assertion is not proving" this very assertion is not designated in the same manner also no characteristic of it is ascertained [there].

Without going into further details of the interpretation of that stanza, the following can be definitely said: If this remark was meant to impart exactly the point which had been highlighted in connection with (A), then the writer of the SS would have successfully accomplished the defence of his assertion propagated in verse 19. None of the remarks made in the previous segments of the SS – according to the interpretation advocated here – militates against the supposition that linguistic items can express propositions which imply truths regarding their own meaning as well as the relationship between themselves and their content. Both the theorem of the impossibility of self-explanatory sentences and its corollary represented in stanza 19 demand only that a linguistic item cannot express something which involves a specification of their own meaning, i.e. a proposition which entails that the concerned linguistic unit possesses the specific meaning which it actually has.

In contrast, the entire section of SS 1-29 does not even furnish the beginning of an adequate account of truth paradoxes. In this connection the fact is important that truth paradoxes do not exclusively arise in the case of sentences which express a direct ascription of (veridical) falsehood or denial of truth with respect to themselves. They are also observable in cases of indirect truth denials, for example, if some item (I) attributes truth to some item (I*) which in its turn ascribes lack of truth with respect to (I). Moreover, the so-called 'Yablo-Paradox' calls into question that direct or indirect self-reference (of the pertinent kind) is a compulsory prerequisite for the formation of truth paradoxes. It appears that the minimum required for a satisfactory account of truth paradoxes consists in the examination of a principle which, notwithstanding a prima facie appearance of plausibility, calls for a critical appraisal. It reads as follows:

If somebody says that P, then he (thereby) says something which is true if and only if (it is the case that) P.

or alternatively:

If some linguistic unit (in particular a declarative sentence) U expresses that P, then U (thereby) expresses something which is true if and only if (it is the case that) P.

As a first step towards an adequate treatment of the pertinent issue it is appropriate to split up the principle by dissecting the biconditional. It should go without saying that the SS does not contain the slightest trace of such considerations.

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12. Or in another formulation:
The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings of its parts and of the syntactic rules by which they are combined.
Cf. Partee/Meulen/Wall 1990:318.

Conclusion

The above presented interpretation of the section of the verses 1-29 of the SS differs considerably from previous readings both in the ancient Indian and in the Western tradition. This could induce the belief that the interpretation cannot be correct. But its dismissal on that account alone can hardly be accepted. As long as an exegesis does not depend on far-fetched assumptions regarding philological and linguistic matters the fact that it entails that the remarks encountered in a textual source rest on a sound theoretical basis justifies its claim for serious consideration. The reason lies in the circumstance that, generally, exegetically relevant import is underdetermined by linguistic meaning and grammatical matters. This in its turn is due to the circumstance that identification of communicative goals depends on an interplay between language-specific rules and conventions, exploitation of ordinary or theoretical knowledge and presumption of rationality of linguistic behaviour. Whereas a carpet cleaner is a device for cleaning carpets a vacuum cleaner is not a device for cleaning vacuum. Whereas a sentence, such as

(7) Everybody has been born at some time.

does not call for an interpretation implying a restriction in the domain of (human) living beings, the situation is different in the case of items like:

(8) Everybody is liable to pay income tax.

Many other examples could be brought in for demonstrating the same point. Even if such phenomena are suited to indicate limitations of principles of compositionality they cannot disprove that compositionality holds good for some varieties of meaning or sense. But a decision about this question is not needed for defending the claim that considerations concerning theoretical soundness play an important role for the assessment of interpretations in the realm of theoretical treatises irrespective of the tradition to which they could be allocated.

The circumstance that assessments of theoretical validity demand the identification of theoretical problems which must be detected in the investigated textual sources themselves and cannot be straightforwardly imported from different sources of another or the same tradition of thought can partly explain the neglect of this aspect in the case of the SS and in studies on Indian philosophical texts in general. But presumably other factors are equally pertinent.

It is sometimes intimated that questions of theoretical motivation disregard the most important and essential component which, in the case of Indian philosophies, allegedly lies in religious endeavours to promote spiritual perfection and salvation. This argument is beset by the flaw of a confusion of levels. An astronomer can be motivated in his profession by religious aspirations because he views his enterprise as an exploration of the mysteries of divine creation. A mathematician could be stimulated to develop theoretical accounts of actual infinities because he believes that in this way he might be able to demonstrate the consistency of the idea of an infinite being. But this does not rule out that both theoreticians attempt to comply with most rigorous scientific standards and even expect that their theoretical statements are evaluated by others under the aspect of theoretical soundness. The objection based on the argument of an essentially religious character of Indian philosophies is too superficial for deserving a detailed appraisal.

There is, however, still another possible factor facilitating a dismissal of theoretical considerations. It is the idea that theoretical rationality is a distinctively Western phenomenon which is apt to promote a denigration of the relevance of theoretical aspects in the area of Non-Western traditions of thought. In the final analysis a rejection of this stance does not require the premise of the falsity of the thesis that the existence of theoretical rationality – or even of rationality in general – is restricted to the West, although it seems that it is in fact blatantly false. The decisive point is rather that verdicts about the non-existence of certain types of rationality in some foreign tradition cannot be a presupposition but at best an outcome of detailed research. If such research should be worthwhile at all, it must be carefully designed in such a manner that its results do not depend on either a positive or negative prejudice in that regard.

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